
Dieter Heinzig, *The Soviet Union and Communist China 1945-1950. The Arduous Road to the Alliance*

Armonk, New York, M.E.Sharpe, 2004, 531 p.

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- 1 With the emergence over the past decade of new documentary evidence about the history of Sino-Soviet relations from Russian and Chinese archives, scholars are re-examining the diplomatic record to complete our understanding of the dynamics of a complex relationship. Dieter Heinzig makes an important contribution to this effort with his meticulous research on Sino-Soviet diplomatic encounters from 1945 to 1950. Heinzig's work relies mostly on new studies by Chinese scholars who have had access to Chinese archival materials (unfortunately still not available to foreign researchers), as well as documentary material from the Russian archives, much of which is cited in the works of Russian scholars, and memoirs from Chinese and Soviet participants in key negotiations.
- 2 In Heinzig's interpretation, conflicting Chinese and Soviet policy interests produced significant obstacles to the development of the Sino-Soviet alliance. Adding his voice to those who question the extent to which the two Communist parties ever experienced true friendship, the author concludes his lengthy study of their difficult negotiations by expressing his surprise that the threat of war between the two states erupted just once in the Soviet period, during the 1969 border clashes.
- 3 After summarising important developments in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) relations with the Comintern and Moscow's China policy during World War II, Heinzig first directs his attention to what he views as Stalin's duplicitous diplomacy from 1945 to 1948 with the Kuomintang on the one hand and the Chinese Communists on the other. Next he focuses on the twists and turns in diplomacy resulting from Stalin's increasing realisation that a Chinese Communist victory was imminent in 1949 and the CCP's efforts to translate its military success into a new relationship with the Soviet Union. The centrepiece of the study is a detailed examination of the diplomatic

exchanges between Chinese and Soviet leaders concerning Mao's lengthy visit to Moscow from December 16th 1949 to February 17th 1950, and the eventual signing of the 1950 Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance. The text of the treaty and related protocols are included in an appendix.

- 4 Throughout the book, the author alludes to enduring controversies in the scholarly literature regarding aspects of the diplomatic history of the era, such as the debate in the United States over "who lost China." There are no conceptual or thematic chapters in the book, however, and it would have been interesting to know where the author situates his work conceptually in the context of these broader issues and debates. Although Heinzig touches on some of these bigger questions and engages other scholars in debates on specific points, he does so primarily to correct the historical record, and his main interest is in reconstructing the positions of the Chinese and Soviet leadership during key diplomatic encounters. As a result, other major events of the era, such as the development of the Cold War and the Korean War, are mentioned only in passing.
- 5 The book is more effective in conveying the complexity of the positions of the Chinese Communists, perhaps because a wider variety of sources were consulted. In contrast to the CCP leaders, who are portrayed as grappling with a range of ideological, political, economic, and military concerns, Stalin at times comes across as a one-dimensional figure, determined to protect his spheres of influence and prevent the Chinese Communists from either instigating a war with the United States over Taiwan or, conversely, from seeking to co-operate with the Americans. There is little sense of the political context for Stalin's China diplomacy, and alternative explanations for his behaviour are never raised.
- 6 Despite the book's considerable length and voluminous footnotes, it is quite readable and ably translated from the original German. Although the introduction and conclusion provide little thematic guidance, Heinzig recapitulates his arguments periodically, which can be slightly repetitive but generally is effective in shepherding the reader through the intricacies of Sino-Soviet interactions. The author's enthusiasm for diplomatic detail comes through clearly, and the work will be of considerable interest to experts on the diplomacy of Sino-Soviet relations.